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- Index in NepJOL
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## **Representing the Marginalized Tamang Community in Bina Theeng's *Yaambunera* [Near Kathmandu]: A Hallian Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper attempts to analyse Bina Theeng's "Yaambunera", the title story of the anthology Yaambunera, exploring the lived experiences of ethnic Tamang people of Taulung, an ignored and unheard village, which is an adjoined village of the Kathmandu valley. The paper discusses the lifestyles, socio-economic condition, struggles, hardships and sufferings of the illiterate Tamang community that analyses the literary value and purpose of representing this marginalized world of common Tamang people. Stuart Hall's concept of representation has been applied as a theoretical tool to achieve the set objectives of the study. Hall argues that representations are not independent and innocent reflections of the real but they are cultural constructions which are selected and constituted by power. In this sense, representation is a cultural product rather than an autonomous process of constructing a meaning. From this theoretical stand, the story is analysed as a discursive representation of Tamang people's marginalized world that produces and defines the overshadowed body of knowledge about ethnic Tamang community and their ways of life. This study, therefore, provides an insight to see and understand the ways of life and sufferings of poor Tamang people of Taulung, an overlooked village though the village is adjoined to the capital city Kathmandu, Nepal.*

**Keywords:** Cultural discourse, discursive representation, marginalized, Tamang community

### **Introduction**

In Nepali literature, writing from the margin became more dominant after the decade of 2000s. The writers who write from the margin represent common people and their life experiences in their literary creations. Basically, this discursive representation of the marginality explores day-to-day life experiences of those marginalized people who do not have "power, participation and integration" in the mechanisms of the state power (Bernt and Colini 14). The depiction of marginalized people and their world was influenced by political upheavals and socio-cultural movements that emerged at the turn of twenty century. In this regard, Kumar Prasad Koirala

elucidates the impacts that Maoist conflict brought political and cultural consciousness to the marginalized groups like the indigenous, Dalit and Madhesi people. The voices of the marginalized people and their consciousness are expressed in Nepali poetry (143). In the same way, Tulasi Acharya views that “Nepali literature has yet to reach its height in terms of its efficacy to bring the unheard melodies of the marginalized who have unique socio-cultural and ethnic and religious and geographical experiences” (par. 1). In fact, the overshadowed world and experiences of the common people are depicted in Nepali literatures that were written after the 2000s.

The trend of writing turned into the phase of representing marginalized communities and their hardships. In this context, Amar Giri explains the turning phase of Nepali literature that depicts the rural area and explores pains and dreams of marginalized community. It unfolds the marginalized people’s painful experiences that they face due to the racial, lingual, cultural and social discrimination, and exploitation (25). Following the same idea, Madhusadan Giri describes the tendency of writing Nepali literature after the 2000s in which the aspirations and desires of oppressed people are expressed (144). Similarly, Abhi Subedi highlights the features of Nepali literature written from the perspectives of marginalized people saying that the feelings with strange mixture of anger and celebration of marginalized class, women and Dalits are depicted in Nepali literature, particularly in poetry (27). Mainly, the writers belonging to marginalized groups like indigenous, women and Dalits write in favor of the marginalized people who do not have their “participation in social, economic, and political life” enjoyed by the rulers in the nation (Alakhunov et. al 10). The writers depict the outshined world of marginalized people aiming to “give voice to the marginalized groups” (Culler 44). Adding to this argument, Rajan Mukarung explains the purposes of writing on the issues of marginalized groups saying that they aimed to re-evaluate the canonical literary works and unfold the outshined histories of all those people who are excluded and dominated by the state (162). The writers belonging to the marginalized groups like indigenous and women represent the common people and their ways of life in their literary works.

Following the trend of writing literary artifacts from the marginalized perspective, Bina Theeng, one of the woman writers belonging to ethnic Tamang community, has written poems and fictions in the favor of marginalized people. The literary works such as *Chhuki* (2013) and *Yaambunera* [*Near Kathmandu*] (2020), the anthologies of story, and *Raato Ghar* [*Red House*] (2015), the anthology of poems, are counted as the cultural discourses of the marginality. As a literary artist of the marginalized groups, Theeng, in her works, explores the ignored world of marginalized people and advocates the voices of indigenous and other minority groups who have been excluded and oppressed by the state power.

The anthology of story *Yaambunera* which includes thirteen stories altogether unfolds the overlooked world of marginalized Tamang community. In this unnoticed world, poor Tamang people live their own life being dissociated from participation and joys of state power. Through the representation of marginalized Tamang people and their struggles, the writer raises voices of the ignored Tamangs for their “entry and attainment” in the mainstream power structures of the state (Thulung par. 1). Among the thirteen stories, the story “Yaambunera”, the title story of the anthology has been selected in this study for the critical analysis. The story is set in Taulung, the adjoined village of Kathmandu valley. The title of the story ‘yaambunera’ is made of the two Nepali words - ‘yaambu’ and ‘nera’. The word ‘yaambu’ stands for Kathmandu, the capital city of the nation and the center of the state power. The word ‘nera’ means near, close to or adjacent. The word ‘yaambunera’ means near Kathmandu valley. Thus, ‘yaambunera’ is Taulung village which is adjoined to Kathmandu. The title may suggest that the village and its people have been marginalized

and overlooked for centuries though it is very close to the capital city Kathmandu. The story writer depicts this overshadowed village where poor and illiterate Tamang people dwell being politically, socially and economically disconnected from the mechanisms of the state power.

In the story “Yaambunera”, poor and illiterate Tamang people are portrayed in the central space as major characters. None of the single person in the village is associated in the mechanisms of the power structures; rather they live their own separate life. This study attempts to answer the research questions: Why does the writer portray the overshadowed world of marginalized Tamang people and their life experiences in the story? How do the poor and illiterate Tamangs struggle for their survival? What various difficulties and sufferings do they face in the story? This study attempts to answer these research questions while analyzing the selected story. This study assumes that the story “Yaambunera” is the cultural discourse of the marginality that represents the overshadowed world of marginalized Tamang community and their day-to-day life experiences. Illiterate and poor Tamang people, their ways of life, struggles, and hardships are depicted in the story in order to reveal the unnoticed and unheard pains of the marginalized Tamang people, and give them voices for their access, achievement and recognition in the nation. To substantiate this argument and achieve the set objectives, Stuart Hall’s concept of representation has been used as a theoretical tool.

### **Hallian Notion of Representation: An Approach**

Hall’s notion of representation is defined as the system of using language for the construction of meanings or representing people and objects meaningfully. For him, representation means “using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people.” In this sense, “representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture” (Hall “The work” 15). As Hall argues, representation is a system of using language for the generation of meanings in a particular context. Pramod K. Nayar further explains Hallian concept of representation with an instance: “representation is the process of signifying (meaning-generation) . . . representation can be an image, a word, a sound or a concept” (20). Representation is the process of generating meanings through systematic use of language in a particular socio-cultural context.

Hall’s idea of representation is undertaken not as an independent entity that simply reflects the reality, but it is assumed as the matter of power relations. Since there is mutual relation between representation and power, the process of selecting, organizing, and representing the objects or people is restricted and regulated by power. Regarding to this point, all representations are the discursive forms of power rather than autonomous ones. Chris Barker clarifies Hall’s concept of representation saying that “since representations are not innocent reflections of the real but are cultural constructions, they could be otherwise than they appear to us” (177). The forms of representations in cultural artifacts are inextricably connected to power relations that include and exclude people, objects, images and concepts in the arrangement of representation. In other words, since representation is discursive product of power, it is “a practice, a kind of work, which uses material objects and effects. But the meaning depends, not on the material quality of the sign, but on its symbolic function” (Hall 25-26). Hall’s concept of representation suggests that representation is a process of signifying system which is not autonomous, but production of power and power relations, i.e. representation of people or objects are selected, arranged and represented by power to generate a specific meaning and body of knowledge.

### **Exploring the Marginalized World of Tamangs and Life Experiences in “Yaambunera”**

The story “Yaambunera” is set in the rural and backward village, Taulung which lies at the

margin of *Yaambu*, Kathmandu valley. The condition of Taulung village and day-to-day activities of illiterate Tamang people are depicted in the central space of the story. This discursive representation of the marginalized village and its poor Tamang people explore the ways of life, pains, sufferings and struggles of ethnic Tamangs that are remained unseen and unheard by the state power. Primarily, the story moves around the struggles and hardships of Som Maya, a young lady from ethnic Tamang community, and other Tamang people. Since all the people in the village are illiterate and poor, they do not have their access and involvement in the mechanisms of Kathmandu valley, the capital city of the rulers and state power. Consequently, they are compelled to either go foreign country in search of job for their survival or remain in the village doing their traditional professions - collecting fire wood to make local wine (*Raksi and Jaanda*), and going down to local market to sell the wine, and collecting grass and looking after the cattle.

The narrator describes the life styles and struggles of Tamang people through the representation of Som Maya and other characters who are compelled to go to the jungle and collect the fire wood. Some of the friends of Som Maya get married and some fly to foreign land in search of job for their survival. But, Som Maya remain alone because neither her parents get loan for her flying to foreign land, nor she gets married (Theeng 46). The narrator further depicts day-to-day activities of Som Maya: “*jangaljaanesabaisaatheesangi chute. Tara vaadhyataaharubhanekahilaichhutenan. Daauraakaatnu, raksipaarnu, bechnalaanu, becheraaaekopaisaaleraasanbharnu, ausadhhiupachaaragarnu. Yaawatvyaavahaarataarnu ta chhadaichhan*” (“all the friends gone away, but her compulsions remained. She is compelled to collect the firewood, make wine, take it to sell, buy rice, do medical treatment, and maintain the business of life” ( my trans, Theeng 46). This discursive representation of Tamang people and their hardships is “a way of representing the knowledge about - a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (Hall 44). The representation of poor Tamang people and their lifestyle unfolds hidden reality and gives body of knowledge about the marginalized Tamang community.

In the same way, the writer explores the life experiences of ethnic Tamang people who live by collecting firewood and making local wine. Som Maya and Pankhule, a married young man, the neighbor of Som Maya, go to the jungle together for the collection of firewood as they are emotionally attached and they like to each other. The narrator describes the Tamang people’s way of life that depends on collecting firewood from the jungle, making the wine and make money for their survival: “*Pankhuleleanganmaabhaaribisaayo. SomMayaleubhieraiparkhirahi. Pankhulelegharbhitrabaataraksikobhaaribokyo. Raksikotheekkaathiyotalafaantamaa. . . .aajaipuryaunuparne. Dubai sangsangailaageoraalo*” (“Som Maya kept on waiting till Pankhule put his load of firewood and carried his load of wine that he delivered down to the market. Both of them went down together” ( my trans, Theeng 48). The depiction of Som Maya’s and Pankhule’s daily activities uncovers the untold and unheard tales of marginalized Tamang people. This discursive representation “presents the world in such a way that we can understand it” (Nayar 20). The story writer represents the marginalized world of Tamang people and their life experiences that unveil the realities about common Limbu people.

The story “Yaambunera” presents the poverty, hardships and perpetual struggles of the ethnic Tamang people that are shown through the representation of Som Maya and her difficulties that she faces in her life. The narrator narrates the painful experiences of Som Maya. She joins the school in grade one at the age of nine, but she is compelled to quit the school after three years because of poverty and compulsion of caring her younger sisters, grazing goats, going to the jungle, and selling wine (Theeng 50). The representation of Som Maya’s life experiences reveals the miserable

condition of ethnic Tamang people who do not have their access to have education and joys of life. This discursive representation enables people to see and know how the marginalized groups live in pains and poverty. It is because “the power of representation lies in its enabling some kinds of knowledge to exist while excluding other ways of seeing” (Barker 177). The portrayal of the marginalized Tamang people and their world provides knowledge about dominated groups.

The story “Yaambunera” not only presents the day-to-day activities and lifestyles of the ethnic Tamang people who live in Taulung, it also explores various pains, sufferings, and difficulties that the poor Tamangs face due to their illiteracy, poverty, and lack of their access to the state power. They are terrified and tortured by the military in the jungle when they go to collect the firewood. They are prohibited to enter the jungle and collect the firewood. The narrator describes a terrible event that the ethnic Tamang people face in the Jungle when they come across with military: the ethnic girls Som Maya, her sister Sangmo, Punam, and Sanu enter the Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park, the prohibited area for cutting down trees for firewood and grass, to collect firewood. Suddenly, the military arrives and threatens them. One of the soldiers orders Sangmo to climb down the tree and clutches her hand. The girls are threatened and terrified (Theeng 52). The representation of ethnic Tamang girls, threat of the military and helpless condition of the girls suggests the domination of the state power and unsecured environment of the innocent young Tamang girls.

The poor Tamang people suffer from pains and poverty as they are not allowed to enter the jungle and cut down the dry trees for firewood. They cannot make wine and sell it without firewood. As a result, they cannot make money to fulfill even their basic needs. Punam expresses her frustration and anxiety for her future: “*mo ta bideshjaanesommaayaa. Daauraakaatnadinnaaparaadhiharle.Raksikelepaarne?Paisaakomukhaidekhnappaenna*” (“I will go to foreign country. How to make wine when the criminals prohibit for cutting down the dry wood? Then, we cannot make money” (my trans, Theeng 53). For Hall, This discursive representation works a “signifying system” that produces specific meaning (“The Spectacle” 61). The representation of the helpless ethnic Tamang girls and the threats of military over them unfold the domination and exploitation of the rulers over the marginalized Tamang community.

The domination of the state power is shown through the depiction of cruel police who torture the poor and helpless Tamang people. On the one hand, they are not allowed to enter the jungle for dry wood. On the other hand, the making of local wine and selling it in the market is banned. As a result, they suffer from poverty and scarcity as their main source of making money is banned. The narrator describes the helpless condition of Som Maya and Pankhule. The police seize the wine on the way that Som Maya and Pankhule are taking to the market for selling. The police snatch the bags of wine and spill them over the road. Then, Som Maya and Pankhule are terrified and threatened not to make and sell the wine again (Theeng 56). The portrayal of Som Maya and Pankhule, and their life experiences shows the pains and sufferings of the helpless marginalized Tamang people. It reveals the cruel domination of the rulers over common people.

The story unfolds the tortures and domination of the rulers over the marginalized Tamang people. The making and selling of wine is banned in the village, the only one profession of the villagers. The police enter into the village and destroy all the utensils and wine. When Som Maya does not let them get in her house and attempts to resist the domination, she is badly beaten and tortured. The narrator explains this cruel domination:

*Usledhokaamaachheki.Thapmahilaapraharuharaayee.KasaileSomMayakohaatasamaae. Eutilekapaalsamai, jagaltai.Arkolelaatletighraamahaani.ShaktilebhyaesammaSom Maya sabaiseetajudhi.Eklaikokehilaagena.Antatahshithilbhai* (Theeng 59).

She blocked at the door. Extra women police arrived and some of them hold her hand. One of them pulled her hair and another one kicked in her thigh. Som Maya kept on fighting till her last strength. She could do nothing alone, eventually, she became weak (my trans, Theeng 59).

The representation of the police, their domination, and resistance of Som Maya involve “the selection and organization of signs and meanings” (Barker161). This discursive representation unveils the pains, sufferings, exploitation, and domination that the marginalized Tamang people face in their day-to-day life in Taulung.

In the story, the writer explores the anger, rebellious behavior, and marginalized-consciousness of the common people. These realities are shown through the representation of Som Maya and, her defiant expressions and struggles. She raises the question to the police on the matter of banning the wine: “*kina napaaune? Bazzarbhari seelpackchaahibechnahune. Haamrochaahi kina nahune?*” (“Why is it not allowed us selling the local wine since sealed packed wines are freely sold in the market?”)(my trans, Theeng 56). Som Maya’s anger and rebel reveals the miseries of ethnic Tamangs who are discriminated and dominated by the state power. The portrayal of this dominated world of Tamang people, as Hall says in “The Spectacles,” is “to represent someone or something in a certain way - within a certain regime of representation” ( 259). This representational discourse of the marginality unfolds the overlooked world of the ethnic Tamang people and their distresses.

Since the poor Tamangs in Taulung are illiterate and they do not have access and participation in the power structures of the state, they do not have other professional skills except making and selling the local wine. In the story, when the police inspector threatens Som Maya and other villagers to give up the illegal profession of making and selling the wine, Som Maya responses that they cannot give up this profession. She replies to the police inspector: “*arukaamtajaandainagaarna. Padhaaichhaina*” (“we do not have other skills to do. We are illiterate” ( my trans, Theeng 60). She also raises questions to the police: “*silpaakbanaaunelaaikhoigaarekokaarbai? . . . gareeblaaimaatrolaagchhaein? Haamilegaarekokaamgairakaanunibhaekaanunitaarikaasikaideunabaaru. Bhaantipuraaeraipaarchhu nee raaksi*” (“why do you not charge those people who make seal pack wine? Does the law punish only to poor ones? If the job that we do is illegal, show us the legal way. We will make the wine accordingly”)( my trans, Theeng 60). The portrayal of Som Maya and her expressions exposes the painful condition of illiterate Tamangs and their compulsions to make the wine for their survival as they do not have other ideas, knowledge, and business skills.

In spite of having the threats and tortures, the Tamang people keep on making the local wine. It is because they are detached from the mechanisms of the state power and they lack knowledge and skill to involve in other professions. Eventually, they are compelled to do the same job despite of having obstacles, difficulties and tortures. This painful, but compulsive condition is represented through the portrayal of Sam Maya and other people in the story. The police force enters into the village, check out every house and destroy all the containers of the booze and wine. Some of the utensils are broken and some are taken by the police. In spite of having all these troubles and tortures, Som Maya goes to the market, sells the gold ring of her mother, and buys all the required utensils and material to make wine. The narrator describes the scene: “*sabaisamaandokomaaraakhera. Som Maya bistaaraibazzarlaaipuchhaarmaachhoddaigaautiraukli. Yaambuner, sutikhetikomelopakdera*” (“Som Maya puts all the materials in her bamboo basket and climb up to the village, Yaambunera. She continued the same profession of making the wine”)(my trans, Theeng 61). The representation of Som Maya and her compulsions to keep on doing the same profession suggests that ethnic Tamang people do not have other alternative jobs. As Hall

argues, representation uses “signs to communicate meaningfully with others” (“The Work. . .” 61), the portrayal of Som Maya and resuming the same profession indicates that the poor and illiterate Tamang people are compelled to make and sell the wine. It is because they are prevented from the access to and participation in the state power.

### Conclusion

Theeng’s story “Yaambunera” is the literary artifacts of the marginality that unfolds the lifestyles, pains, struggles, and hardships of the marginalized Tamang people who dwell in Yaambunera, Taulung village. The story represents the ethnic Tamang people who do not have their access to and participation in the state power because of their illiteracy and lack of knowledge. As they are disconnected from the political, social and economic mechanisms of the state, they live their own life in the village involving in their daily activities like going to the jungle to collect firewood, making local wine and selling, looking after the cattle and so on. The story also explores the troubles, tortures, pains, and problems that the poor Tamang people face in the village. They are forbidden to enter in the jungle. The making of the local wine and selling is banned which is the only one profession that they know for their survival. But they do not give up the profession of making the wine and selling because they do not have any other alternative ways.

The Tamang people, their lifestyles, experiences, difficulties and struggles are represented in the story in order to unfold the overshadowed realities and body of knowledge; and give voice to the marginalized Tamang communities for their access and achievement in the state power. This study provides insights to see and realize the condition of marginalized Tamang people and their day-to-day life experiences. This study cannot include the analysis of other issues that the story contains due to the limitations of the study and time constraints. Thus, the upcoming researcher can do further research and analysis of the anthology Yaambunera from various perspectives like Subaltern studies, Local color, Gender theory, and so on.

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